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Female Superintendents and the Professional Victim Syndrome: Preparing Current and Aspiring Superintendents to Cope and Succeed

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Female Superintendents and the Professional Victim Syndrome: Preparing Current and Aspiring Superintendents to Cope and Succeed

Walter Polka, Peter Litchka and Sheryl W. Davis

This article presents and analyzes the findings of two recent studies related to female school superintendents and their respective experiences with the "professional victim syndrome" and the consequences of their career decisions. Those findings are synthesized with research and literature related to leadership skills and dispositions to identify conceptual patterns of significance for current and aspiring female superintendents. The strategies utilized by female superintendents to cope with the trials and tribulations of contemporary educational leadership as reported in both studies are also reviewed. Suggestions for leadership preparation programs are recommended to promote greater personal and professional success in the superintendency.

Introduction

This research report presents the findings of two recent studies that both utilized the mixed-methods research design to collect information from more than 500 superintendents, including more than 150 female superintendents, in Georgia and New York in 2006. The results of both studies reinforce and extend the findings of other contemporary research about female superintendents and provide important recommendations for aspiring and practicing superintendents to consider in order to cope and succeed. The recommendations of both of these recent research studies related to superintendent preparation programs are included for consideration by members of boards of education, administrators at local, state and regional educational organizations and certification agencies as well as professors at colleges and universities engaged in leadership programs.

Women and the School Superintendency

The American school superintendency has been a leadership position dom-

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inated by white males since the inception of the office in Buffalo, New York in 1837 (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995). However, females have always played a significant role in leading American education, not only as teachers but also as administrators including school superintendents. Throughout history, the education profession has been a predominately female occupation. Some early twentieth century prominent educators such as the first female superintendent of the Chicago public schools (1909), Ella Flagg Young, had very optimistic visions concerning major leadership roles for women in that century. She confidently stated, "In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast education system" (Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993, p. 1).

However, the twentieth century did not live up to those expectations for women. The percentage of female superintendents has been increasing in recent years but, as depicted in Figure 1, that trend has not been consistent in the twentieth century. Approximately 75% of America's professional educational work force is female (Davis, 2007) while only approximately 21.7% of the school superintendents are female (Glass, T., & Franceschini, L., 2007).

The information for Figure 1 was derived from various superintendency references. (Alston, 2005; Brunner, 2000; Davis; Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini).
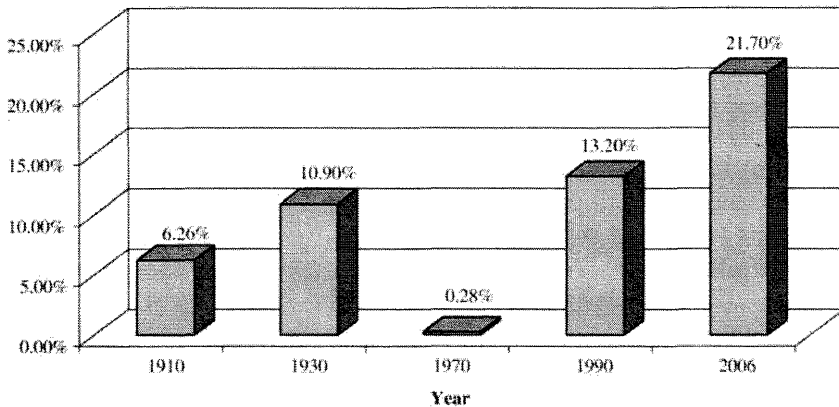
Figure 1. Percentage of Female School Superintendents.

A number of dynamic social, political, economic and cultural forces impacted both the major decline and the consistently low percentage level of female superintendents in the historical period from 1930 to 1980 including, but not limited to: desegregation of public schools and culturally entrenched gender and race biases (Alston). However, during the same period, the status and presence of women in the workforce, as well as the opportunities for inclusion in previously male dominated roles, increased dramatically as a result of the following key American history benchmarks:

• 19th Amendment to the Constitution (1920)
• World War II workforce needs
• Civil Rights Act of 1964
• Title IX Act (1972).

Females became more prominent in the twentieth century workforce and were provided more equal opportunities to participate in the general American cultural experience, yet they were still not proportionally represented in the chief leadership position of the profession where they were a historical majority—superintendent of schools.

The twenty-first century also has not been the harbinger of equity in the superintendency that some may have postulated. Contemporary researchers cite discrimination, gender structuring and leadership preparation programs as factors contributing to this disproportionate representation of females (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).In a recent American Association of School Administrators (AASA) publication, it was reported that,

A substantial amount of literature describes the absence of women in the superintendency. The general themes of glass ceilings, lack of mentoring, board/community resistance, unhelpful search consultants, and lack of appropriate preparation appear frequently in many qualitative and quantitative studies (Glass & Franceschini, p. 17).

These recent proclamations about this disproportionate representation of women in school district leadership reinforce the concept that the American superintendency has been and still may be the "most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States" (Glass, 1992, p. 8). Thus, many believe that there still exists a very powerful "glass ceiling" for aspiring superintendents who happen to be female, and that this barrier continues to deprive capable and deserving women the opportunity to become the leaders of school districts.

The Professional Victim Syndrome

The contemporary American school superintendent is expected to carry out a majority of the roles and duties of the office in a very public manner. This "public presence" is becoming increasingly more acute in communities across America as schools focus on implementing the key accountability provisions of state and federal legislative acts and reforming education (Brandt, 2000). In addition, researchers investigating the concept of what works in contemporary education contend that,

> At no time in recent memory has the need for effective and inspired leadership been more pressing than it is today. With the increasing needs in our society, and in the workplace, for knowledgeable, skilled and responsible citizens, the pressure on schools intensifies. The expectation that no child be left behind in a world and economy will require everyone's best is not likely to subside (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005, p. 123).

In communities across America, superintendents of schools have become a focal point for ensuring that the schools are progressing congruently with contemporary educational expectations. There is a collective perception on the part of the American public, fueled by the media and politicians, that one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century is to reinvent, reshape, and transform educational institutions (Peterson & Short, 2001).

Superintendents of schools are charged with the responsibility of that reinvention, reshaping, and transforming of their respective school districts and assuring the public that their schools are providing quality education at reasonable costs in an environment that promulgates excellence and equity. However, the contexts in which superintendents work are continually impacted by various social, political and economic factors that exert pressures on their leadership skills and, consequently, affect them personally and professionally (Norton, 2005).

Contemporary superintendents frequently experience the "professional victim syndrome," defined as,

> . . . the condition confronted by many educational leaders, especially superintendents of schools, who faced a career crisis in which his/her professional and personal reputation was being tarnished, and he/she had the challenge of navigating the political waves in order to survive, literally and figuratively, as a leader and a person (Polka & Litchka, 2007a, p. 3).

All superintendents of schools have the potential to become professional victims, and, female superintendents experience this condition at about the same rate or slightly greater than their male counterparts. However, the impact on the individual female superintendent's personal and professional lives including relationships with their family, friends and colleagues may be more intense and longer lasting (Polka & Litchka).

The female superintendents identified the loneliness impact of the position as well as the added stress associated with being a female superintendent in contemporary America (Polka & Litchka; Davis). The following poem by a new female superintendent going through the professional victim syndrome captures this experience:

> Lonely . . .
> Ostracized. Why? Because I'm an Outsider and a woman?
> New to most people in the community
> Excellence, they said, focus on academic excellence.
> Lead and we will follow.
> Yes, I have led and I am very lonely. (Davis, p. 30)

Purposes of the Studies and Research Questions

"Illegitimi Non Carborundum: The Contemporary School Superintendency and Experiences Related to the Professional Victim Syndrome"

The purpose of this research study was to ascertain the specific issues that caused professional victim situations to develop and those resiliency and reflective behaviors that contributed to the individual superintendent's ability to overcome the trauma associated with being a professional victim (Polka & Litchka, p. 5).

The following was the overarching research question of that study: What are the professional victim syndrome experiences of contemporary superintendents in both New York and Georgia? The study focused on answering the following six sub-questions to investigate additional information pertinent to the overall question:

1. What are the demographics of current New York and Georgia superintendents?
2. What is the frequency of the professional victim syndrome occurring in both states?
3. What are the relationships between superintendent demographics and their experiences with the professional victim syndrome?
4. What are the "lived experiences" of particular superintendents who have been professional victims during their respective careers?
5. What resiliency and reflective strategies were used by those superintendents to cope with their respective professional victim syndrome?

6. What advice do superintendents who were professional victims give to others to help them cope with similar situations? (Polka & Litchka, pp. 5–6).

"Career Paths of Female Superintendents in Georgia"

The purpose of this study was to study the career paths of females who served as public school superintendents in Georgia during the 2006–2007 school year (Davis, p. 18).

The following was the overarching question of that research study: What are the typical career paths and barriers for female leaders pursuing the superintendency in Georgia? That study focused on answering the following four sub-questions to investigate additional information pertinent to the overall question:

1. What formal academic preparation experiences did female superintendents in Georgia possess?
2. What support systems are in place for female superintendents in Georgia?
3. What strategies for advancement did female superintendents employ in their pre-superintendency careers?
4. What barriers do female superintendents experience in their paths to the superintendency and what strategies are employed to address the perceived barriers? (Davis, pp. 18–19)

Research Methodology

Both of the above research studies utilized the mixed study design consisting of both quantitative and qualitative components since that methodology provided additional insights by expanding information about the topic under investigation (Creswell, 2003; Newman & Benz, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Using this study design enabled the researchers to gather both general demographic information as well as rich personal information through their respective research questions.

In both research studies initial quantitative instruments were sent to the respective targeted populations to collect demographics and responses to key concepts associated with the topics of investigation. Some respondents to those instruments identified their interest in being interviewed by the researchers. Dates, times and locations for "face-to-face" interviews were established at the convenience of those superintendents who volunteered to participate in the qualitative component.

However, given the demands of the superintendency, especially the variety of unexpected intervening events that occur daily, it was not possible to interview all of the superintendents who initially desired to be interviewed and/or who were scheduled to be interviewed. But, the value of this mixed-methods design has been well-documented (Creswell; Newman & Benz). And, it has been accepted as a comprehensive research design by a number of contemporary researchers (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Glesne, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie).

Populations and Samples of the Research Studies

The quantitative target populations for both studies and the respective samples of each one including the number and percentage of females are identified in Tables 1.

It is important to note the high percentage of quantitative survey instruments returned by the target population for each study. This participation rate is much higher than anticipated and above the acceptable standards as reported in the statistical references (Newton & Rudestrom, 1999). This provided a representative sample for each study and may reflect the seriousness that practicing superintendents attached to each of the respective studies.

The qualitative target populations for both studies and the respective interview samples of each one, including the number and percentage of females, are identified in Table 2.

Both of these qualitative samples represent the targeted population and include a high percentage of female participants given the percentage of female superintendents in each state. This is mainly due to the scope of the Davis study that was limited to female superintendents in Georgia. However, the somewhat higher than anticipated percentage of female superintendents willing to participate in the qualitative component of the Polka-Litchka study may indicate the extent and intensity of the professional victim syndrome related to them.

Polka-Litchka Quantitative Study Findings

There were several key findings of the quantitative component of the Polka-Litchka study related to pertinent demographics of superintendents who have experienced the professional victim syndrome.

Superintendents who responded to the survey instrument from both Georgia and New York identified that they generally have more than 30 years of educational experience. Most of the superintendents (88.8%) have more than twenty years of experience in education. These superintendents are not newcomers to the profession—they are well-seasoned educators who have vast experience.

In both states, almost half (45%) of those superintendents who responded to the quantitative component of the Polka-Litchka research reported that they have had five years or less experience in the superintendency. Most of the superintendents (71%) reported 10 or fewer years of experience in the superintendency. Also, most of the reporting superintendents (58.6%) held only one superintendency. More than a quarter of those reporting (27.3%) identified that they held two superintendent positions in their careers. Thus, a sizable majority of the superintendents (85.9%) reported that they were either in their first or second superintendency (Polka & Litchka, 2007b, p. 258)

Table 1
Quantitative Components of the Research Studies.

Research Study	Author	Targeted Population for Study	# of Surveys Sent to Targeted Population	# of Surveys Returned (Study Sample)	% of Surveys Returned	# of Females in Sample	% of Females in Sample
"Illegitimi Non Carborundum: . . ."	Polka & Litchka	All Georgia & New York Superintendents	845	492	58.2	134	27.2
"Career Paths of Female Superintendents:"	Davis	All Georgia Female Superintendents	36	27	75	27	100

Table 2
Qualitative Components of the Research Studies.

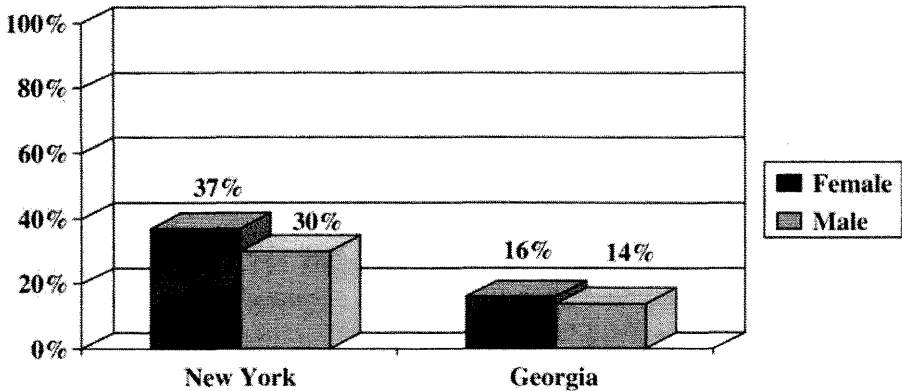| Research Study	Author	Targeted Population for Study	# of Interview Requests Sent to Targeted Population	# of Interviews Conducted (Study Sample)	% of Target Population Interviewed	# of Females Interviewed	% of Females Interviewed
"Illegitimi Non Carborundum: . . ."	Polka & Litchka	All Georgia & New York Superintendents	492	30	6	10	33

Figure 2. Positive Responses (yes) to Questions 6–10 by Gender (Polka & Litchka, 2007a, p. 16).

According to the Polka-Litchka sample, experiences in this school leadership office as well as the number of superintendencies held are limited, which impacts the position and may have consequences for carrying out the duties of the office and making meaningful educational reforms (Polka & Litchka, p. 260).

Almost one-third of the New York superintendents (32%) and 15% of the Georgia superintendents responded positively to at least one of the following questions :

• Fired as Superintendent?
• Resigned as Superintendent?
• Mutual decision to leave as Superintendent?
• Contract not renewed as Superintendent?
• Sought legal assistance as Superintendent?

However, in both states, the percentage of female superintendents who responded positively to these questions was slightly higher than male superintendents as depicted in Figure 2. This indicates that female superintendents are subjected to the professional victim syndrome at least at a rate equal to or greater than their male counterparts.

In New York, 68% of the superintendents who responded positively to questions 6–10 were either in their first or second superintendency. In Georgia, 67% of the superintendents were either in their first or second superintendency. Thus, two-thirds of the superintendents who responded to having professional victim syndrome experiences were in their first or second superintendency, but one-third of the respondents were in their third or more superintendency. Polka and Litchka conclude that the professional victim syndrome may occur at any time during the superintendency at about the same frequency (Polka & Litchka, p. 21).

Consequently, it is imperative that all current and aspiring superintendents recognize the omnipresence of the professional victim syndrome and be prepared to deal with it. Female superintendents, especially, need to be well prepared to deal with this syndrome since they may be more likely to experience it than their male counterparts. And, as a minority in the superintendency, women are still subject to gender bias and prejudice in their communities and among their employees as well as among the members of the boards of education who supervise them.

Although females comprise approximately 75% of the educational labor force, they still do not possess the historical experience as a subgroup in the position of superintendent of schools. Their networks are not as numerous nor as powerful as those of males and, thus, their ability to cope and survive a professional victim syndrome may be less than adequate.

Davis Quantitative Findings

The questionnaire used in the Davis study was designed and piloted in a study on women in leadership (Anderson, 1998). Permission was granted to duplicate the questionnaire for similar studies in Georgia (Pipkin, 2002).

The key findings of the quantitative component of the Davis study related to female superintendents' perceptions of career advancement barriers and strategies to overcome those barriers are depicted in Table 3 and Table 4.

The three barriers to female superintendent advancement receiving the highest mean score in the Davis study were: conflicting demands of career and family (3.27), existence of the "buddy system" in which men refer other men to jobs (3.18), lack of political know-how (3.07). The next two highest scores for barriers were: exclusion from informal socialization process of "good ole boy network" (2.96), and gender bias in screening and selection process (2.92) (Davis, p. 60).

Davis also identified that the top ten most effective strategies for females in attaining the superintendency were: developing political know-how (4.62), developing a strong self concept (4.55), learning the characteristics of the school district in which applying for a position (4.51), obtaining the support of family (4.44), attending workshops to improve professional skills (4.29), learning coping skills (4.29), enhancing interviewing skills (4.25), gaining access to community power (4.18), and increasing visibility in professional circles (4.18) (Davis, p. 63).

The quantitative findings of the Davis study confirm that the pressure to conform to male expectations regarding the superintendency was perceived as a barrier for several female administrators. Davis' findings are consistent with the belief that this problem of conformity may stem from negative reactions to a woman's role in leadership and assessments of her performance and effectiveness as incompetent (Stelter, 2002).

Table 3
Ranking of Georgia Female Superintendent's Perception of Barriers.

Rank	Barrier	N	Mean
1	Conflicting demands of career and family	27	3.27
2	Existence of the "buddy system" in which men prefer men for jobs	27	3.18
3	Lack of political "know how"	27	3.07
4	Lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff	27	2.96
5	Gender bias in screening and selection process	27	2.92
6	Lack of strong women's network like "good ole boy network"	27	2.84
6	The belief that women must be better qualified than men in order to attain top level administrative positions	27	2.84
7	The predominance of male candidates for administrative positions	27	2.81 .
8	Lack of ability to relocate as a result of personal commitments	27	2.77
9	Doubt about female's long term career commitment by those hiring	27	2.57
10	Lack of acceptance by female administrators and staff	27	2.50
11	Lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff	27	2.46
12	Lack of a mentor	27	2.44
12	Covert sex discrimination	27	2.44
13	Lack of self-confidence in ability to succeed in top jobs	27	2.42
14	The belief that women do not make good administrators	27	2.37
15	Potential colleagues' insubordination in working for a female boss	27	2.38
16	Overt sex discrimination	27	2.24
17	Lack of motivation to compete for jobs	27	2.19
18	Inappropriate career path experiences	27	2.14
19	Childhood socialization to "proper" roles for men and women	27	1.96

Note: 1 = Not a Major Barrier, 5 = A Major Barrier
(Davis, pp. 61–62)

Table 4
Georgia Female Superintendents' Perceptions of Advancement Strategies.

Rank	Strategies	N	Mean
1	Developing political "know-how"	27	4.62
2	Developing a strong self-concept	27	4.55
3	Learning the characteristics of the school district in which applying for a position	27	4.51
4	Obtaining the support of family	27	4.44
5	Attending workshops to improve professional skills	27	4.29
5	Learning coping skills	27	4.29
7	Enhancing interviewing skills	27	4.25
8	Gaining access to community power	27	4.19
9	Preparing an effective resume	27	4.18
9	Increasing visibility in professional circles	27	4.18
10	Obtaining a doctorate	27	4.0
10	Enlisting in a mentor	27	4.0
11	Increasing flexibility to relocate	27	3.96
12	Learning strategies of successful women in other fields	27	3.77
13	Learning how to deal with sex discrimination	27	3.55
14	Adopting a female role model	27	3.48
15	Using a women's network similar to "good ole boy's network"	27	3.30
16	Invoking affirmative action and/or Title IX	27	2.07

Note: 1 = Not a Successful Strategy, 5= Highly Successful Strategy
(Davis, p. 64)

Summary of Qualitative Research Findings

The female superintendents interviewed by Davis verbalized both the advantages and the barriers associated with being a female in the contemporary male dominated superintendency. Davis summarized that,

> "All five of the females interviewed exhibited great strength and self-confidence. They were confident in their ability to lead and expressed a strong sense of satisfaction in the job they held. True to the literature, they all expressed a collaboration model of leadership and defined power as being shared with others" (Davis, pp. 74–75).

All of the female superintendents interviewed by Davis agreed that females need to mentor other females and develop better networking to promote and sustain their increased presence in contemporary educational leadership (Davis, p. 75). However, they confirmed a contemporary pervasive view in the literature that even with a mentor available, many women still have an uneasy relationship with power and the traits necessary to be a leader (Kantrolwitz, 2007). And, each superintendent expressed a feeling of loneliness, at times, in the position of superintendent (Davis, p. 71).

As a result of the findings of their qualitative component, Polka and Litchka concluded that the personal and professional preparation of the superintendent for facing a career-threatening crisis is of utmost importance to the resiliency of the superintendent and his or her ability to personally and professionally survive (Polka & Litchka, p. 59).

They contend that, "Superintendents must be prepared to face the reality of the political nature of their position, and have a deep understanding of the professional victim syndrome, and finally have the skills and dispositions necessary to overcome and be stronger if this should occur" (Polka & Litchka, 2007 b, p. 264).

Some superintendents interviewed for their study suggested that, as bad as the crisis was, this was the reality of being a superintendent of schools in contemporary America. However, a majority of the thirty superintendents still harbor very bitter feelings and resentment towards those responsible for their victimization. Looking back some referred to the crisis as a "life-altering" experience. One female superintendent stated, "I often wonder why I had to become a politician and couldn't be allowed to be an educational leader. It seems everything we tried to build was destroyed by politics" (Polka & Litchka, 2007a, p. 35).

According to the superintendents they interviewed, the chances of surviving the professional victim syndrome will depend on whether or not the individual has core beliefs and values as a foundation, and whether or not, he/she is persistent in using them. In addition, superintendents need to ensure that a network exists of family, friends and trusted colleagues including a key mentor and a personal lawyer. It was apparent that those who did have such a network were able to survive the crisis in a better condition than those who did not (Polka & Litchka, p. 51).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Five Cs for Personal Coping and Surviving
the Professional Victim Syndrome

Social science research on coping with personal stress and/or organizational change has identified that the following five individual personal dispositions are significant in dealing with the stress associated with changes:

- Challenge
- Commitment

- Control
- Creativity
- Caring

The above Cs have been researched in various educational settings and have been found to be significant for organizational and personal satisfaction and productivity in a climate of pervasive flux (Polka, Mattai & Perry, 2000).

Each individual must look at life as a constant "challenge" and develop the ability to see change, even a crisis, as an opportunity (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). Superintendents who are able to cope most successfully with significant life changes exhibit a strong "commitment" to themselves, their families, and their profession (Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn, 1982). They believe and act as if they are in "control" and can influence the outcome of events in their particular lives no matter how disastrous they may seem (Glasser, 1990). Educational leaders, who possess the "creativity" to envision optimal experiences, even in the face of the professional victim syndrome or when confronting the barriers to their professional advancement because of their gender, are able to cope most effectively with change (Csikszentmihaly). And, a "caring" family attitude in the work place or possessing a caring network or mentor who can provide nurture in times of tension are important in the effective adjustment to crisis and developing personal resiliency (DePree, 1989).

These five personal dispositions have also been cited as the key "hardiness factors" of the management personnel that contributed to the success of companies classified by Collins, a contemporary management researcher, as those companies who, ". . . have made the leap from good to great" (Collins, 2001, p. 82).

> Therefore, . . . superintendents of schools, are the key people at the helm of school organizational change in this initial decade of the twenty-first century and they each need to practice the dispositions of challenge, commitment, control, creativity and caring on a regular basis in order to enhance their survival and to promote their personal enjoyment and organizational success (Polka & Litchka, 2007b, p. 264).

The five personal coping dispositions have been identified as key components for organizational and personal satisfaction and productivity in diverse literature and research studies including both the Polka-Litchka and the Davis studies of the contemporary superintendency. Educational leaders, especially female superintendents, must focus on their personal coping skills in order to further develop their resiliency and overcome the barriers to achieving their career leadership objectives. Enhancing these dispositions will facilitate their survival when the inevitable crises occur.

The superintendents identified the value of understanding yourself as well as mentoring and personal support groups to help overcome the stress associated with career crises. This is consistent with contemporary man-

agement consultants who state, ". . . If change is to be successful, people need to recruit the help of those around them. We need each other. That is why support groups work when people are facing changes or times of stress in their lives" (Blanchard & Waghorn, 1997, pp. 159–160).

Some female support groups and/or networks might be more limited in scope than the "good ole boy" networks of their male counterparts because some professional women may prefer more intimate networks of limited numbers of colleagues. Female educational leaders reflecting on female professional support groups exclaimed, "Women too often act like 'Crabs in a Basket' when there are more than four of them in a professional network" (Anderson, Brown, Gamble, Leaver, Perkins, & Poole, 2007). Whether that concept is simply a perception or a reality, it still needs to be addressed so that powerful female leaders have more nurturing colleagues to assist them in times of crisis and especially when they experience the trauma associated with the professional victim syndrome.

Superintendents who had a professional victim experience offered the following advice, ". . . as soon as possible, 'find people you can trust,' 'get a support network,' 'have a mentor,' and 'be ready-it's only a matter of time before it will happen.' At a minimum, such support would allow the victimized superintendent to have a sense of personal control of their emotions and a healthier perspective of the situation" (Polka & Litchka, p. 260). That advice is particularly important for practicing and/or aspiring female superintendents who may not have an established substantial professional support group given their historical "minority" status in the superintendency.

Superintendents have effectively promulgated organizational changes fomented by various cultural forces by focusing on the personal concerns of their subordinates. But, for sustaining their own personal and organizational survival it is imperative that they apply the same "high-touch" approaches to themselves and recharge their resiliency capacities.

Resiliency is a skill that can help leaders persevere during difficult times, and perhaps become even stronger as a result. Contemporary researchers suggest that resilient leaders have six common qualities:

1. Resilient leaders accurately assess past and current reality.
2. Resilient leaders are positive about future possibilities.
3. Resilient leaders remain true to personal values.
4. Resilient leaders maintain a strong sense of personal efficacy.
5. Resilient leaders invest personal energy wisely.
6. Resilient leaders act on the courage of personal convictions
   (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005, p. 147).

A key issue is how and when do aspiring and current superintendents learn, practice and become competent at using the qualities of resiliency as they lead their districts and stay strong during difficult times? Polka and Litchka found a number of superintendents who, as professional victims, had little, if any, understanding of the nature of resiliency in leadership.". . . Those superintendents who displayed resilient qualities did so in a random

and unstructured manner, which leads to the conclusion that more formal and on-going training in resiliency is essential to survival in the contemporary superintendency" (Polka & Litchka, 2007a, pp. 55–56).

Several personal characteristics of resilient people that are consistent with the above concepts have been enumerated in the resiliency literature as, ". . . good decision making skills, assertiveness, impulse control, and problem solving skills as well as sense of humor, internal focus of control, autonomy, positive view of personal future, self-motivation, personal competence and feelings of self worth." (Henderson & Milstein, 1996, p. 9). Researchers contend that resiliency is a process more than a list of traits and it can be learned (Higgins, 1994). Therefore, current superintendents and/or those aspiring to the position can be taught how to survive in leadership positions.

An astute reviewer of educational leadership programs once pronounced, "the problem with educational leadership preparation programs today is that they are driven by neither education nor leadership." (Murphy, 2001, p.1). Most of the female superintendents interviewed shared the fact that they had never received any type of training, support or preparation in dealing with the intricate politics of superintendent-board relations, nor were they ever prepared for dealing with the personal and professional assaults that would ultimately occur during the crisis—even though all superintendents and education leaders have learned and prepared to lead the organization through a crisis.

Several women shared that they had never experienced the "in your face" type of aggressive bullying that they encountered in executive sessions when some board members decided to "take off" on them personally and other board members were simply complacent. They felt that they needed more preparation in the challenge of conducting "executive sessions" and developing personal interaction skills for dealing with highly aggressive people who also are your "bosses." In addition, they expressed a need to further enhance their personal sense of control to be able to withstand those personal assaults and continue to function effectively as a leader (Polka, Litchka & Davis, 2007).

The five dispositions or Cs and the resiliency characteristics should be a major component of any superintendent preparation program at the university level as well as at the statewide certification level. Education in the twenty-first century can no longer continue to lose key leaders, especially females, because of lack of appropriate training for their own self-survival. Moreover, many women at the pinnacle of professional and academic positions have exceptional stories to tell, lessons to teach, and issues to face that raise questions about the contemporary nature of power in America.

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